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ABSTRACT

The intellectual and moral climate of a school is related to the nature of authority. It is the way that authority is instituted as well as the manner in which it is exercised that shapes the intellectual and moral character of the school. Public education in urban areas today is increasingly instrumental, technical, adversarial, and officially value-neutral. The burden placed on the public high schools to create a more equal society has helped create purposive disorder. Schools are increasingly operated as though they were factories for learning in which the only value is increased cognitive output. A fundamental rethinking of the nature and purpose of public education is essential. A provisional morality that expresses some of the common beliefs of a democratic pluralistic society must be reinvented. Such a morality would mean that, although differences of opinions on many issues should be respected by all, there are some salient core beliefs to which all subscribe. Without an agreement on a system of beliefs, there is no pluralism, merely coexistence. (SM)

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Education, Character, and American Schools

Gerald Grant

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Education, Character, and American Schools

GERALD GRANT

SEVERAL YEARS AGO near Harlan, Kentucky, a young priest led me up a washed-out mountain road to see some children at home before I visited the local public schools. When we reached the house, really a shack propped up on cinder blocks, the children peered shyly at the stranger. There were seven of them, barefoot and poorly dressed. The next morning I saw one of the youngest, Jay, in his one-room school, a few miles down a winding road past heaps of coal slag. It, too, was a kind of shack, except that, unlike Jay's house, it had some paint on the clapboards. Inside, a young teacher whose blackboard instructions suggested she might have trouble passing a grammar and vocabulary test, did her pleasant best to teach Jay and his classmates. There were a few books in the corner near a wood stove and little in the way of games or enrichment materials.

In the afternoon I visited the Middle School, a substantial brick building attended by Jay's sisters and brothers. This looked more like a mainstream American school. There was evidence of several new federal aid programs, including one staffed by two "reading specialists" who sat in the back of a classroom reading *Watchtower*, but I doubted their effect on Jay's family.

When I left Kentucky, Jay's life seemed bleak, and the schools within his reach gave little hope for significantly improving his prospects. Yet, some schools could make a great difference. If Jay were sent to live with an aunt in Brookline, Massachusetts, he would enter a different world. Even if his aunt did not live in an affluent section of Brookline, but in one of its crumbling borders abutting the Boston city limits, he would be absorbed, perhaps frightened, by a radically different intellectual, social, and aesthetic culture. His classmates, many of them Jewish, would be two or three years above the national averages on standard tests of verbal and mathematical ability. Whereas he might never have seen a violin in his one-room school in Kentucky, here in third grade every child would be given a violin and learn to play some simple tunes on it. By the time he got to Brookline High he might be speaking a different language in terms of his cognitive capacities in English, as well as speaking French or Spanish. Some of his teachers would have degrees from prestigious universities and would encourage him to think of college choices, since nearly all of his classmates would continue. Jay would have moved from a state that spent an annual average of $1,264 per pupil to one that spent $2,261.

Of course, Jay's aunt and the quality of his home life would be critical in his adjustment to the school. It would matter greatly if, on the one hand, his aunt

had left Kentucky to become a slightly alcoholic waitress who worked nights, or if, on the other, she had joined the WAVES, seen something of the world, had become a teacher who loved literature, and developed a circle of friends that gave some amplitude and cheer to her life. The capacity to provide nurture and discipline matters. We have fresh evidence from recent British studies confirming the importance of simple rules and sanctions in the home by adults who are there to enforce them—rules to limit television viewing, establish curfews, and set time aside for homework. Such parental supervision explains more of the differences in juvenile delinquency rates than do differences in social class as such.[1]

In the United States, James Coleman's remarkable survey, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, argued that the combination of social class and family background explained the most significant differences in cognitive outcomes among schools.[2] Coleman's major finding was that the schools, at least as then constituted, had little effect on overcoming the disadvantages children brought from home. This was popularly interpreted as meaning schools have no independent effects, which Coleman himself never said. He would agree, for instance, that without schools many children would never learn mathematics or understand the principles of science. He simply pointed out that schools seemed powerless to reduce inequality in the cognitive deficits between groups of pupils. The children themselves were the dominant influence in establishing the ethos of the school, and if you wanted to change that climate, Coleman argued,[3] you should change the pupil mix.

Now—again from across the Atlantic—in an ingenious study by Michael Rutter and his colleagues, *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, our attention is directed to the action of responsible adults in shaping the ethos of the school.[4] Unlike Coleman, who surveyed students and teachers at one particular time to discover the correlations between the inputs and outputs of schooling, Rutter followed the same twenty-seven hundred pupils from the end of elementary school through twelve different secondary schools in South London. Suppose Jay's aunt lived on the Boston side of the Brookline boundary rather than in Brookline itself. According to Rutter, it might be of the greatest significance which Boston high school he was bused to. Rutter's research shows that it is necessary to have a core of able pupils around which a good climate or ethos in the school can be formed. Having this solid core, the school can then absorb many poor and difficult pupils while achieving successful outcomes in both social and cognitive terms. Rutter showed that climates do differ markedly in schools with similar intakes of pupils, and that these differences in intellectual and social climates have real effects on student success in school-leaving exams and whether or not pupils wind up in trouble with the law. A primary-school child who is identified as potentially troublesome at age ten has a 48 percent probability of delinquency if he goes to Secondary School A, but only a 9 percent likelihood if he goes to School B, although both schools enroll roughly the same proportion of "difficult" children.

Rutter argues convincingly that these differences in climate between schools have effects in achievement and patterns of delinquency that are independent of a pupil's intelligence or home background. The climate is like a tide that lifts the success and standards of behavior of all students within the school, although it does not reduce the variations among pupils in the same school.

Since Rutter was interested in both the forms and consistency of discipline in a school, he asked a sampling of adults how they would respond to ten specific disciplinary problems, which the researchers came to call "The Naughty Children Scale." For example, they were asked, "What would you do about a very quiet first-year child who is stealing small items from other pupils and keeping them in his/her locker?" In some of the schools there was no consensus at all, while in others staff and teachers generally agreed about what would be done in such a case. Shared perspectives about discipline were associated with better outcomes.

Three broad patterns emerged from Rutter's findings. First, schools differ in the expectations they have for pupils in ways that are independent of actual abilities or disposition to misbehavior. In the schools with favorable outcomes, teachers expected pupils to do well on exams, regularly assigned and marked homework (which turned out to be much more important than the amount of *time* pupils spent on homework), expected pupils to act responsibly, and gave them an opportunity to do so through appointments to quasi-supervisory posts. Teachers also conveyed their expectations in the way they behaved themselves. Students achieved more and exhibited better conduct in those schools where teachers were punctual, started lessons on time, and taught a full period. Teachers in one school spent more than a third of class time in nonsubject matter activities (chatting about sports, attending to administrative matters, fiddling with the projector, or cleaning up), while in others the average loss of teaching time was less than 15 percent. Expectations are also created by senior staff. In some schools the teachers knew that senior staff were checking to see whether they had set reasonable homework assignments, and in other schools teachers thought their superiors did not care.

Second, Rutter's data show that consistency and shared norms are strongly related to both better behavior and exam success. Good schools are like good families: specific forms of punishment matter less than that the parents—or teachers—are generally fair and consistent, both about the standards they expect and the penalties for transgressing them. Schools in the sample differed both in their consensus about goals (based on staff ranking of goals that range from "helping students to develop their personality" to "preparing them for a job") and in their agreement about means for achieving them. In the poorest performing schools, teachers taught pretty much as they wanted, whereas results were better when teachers engaged in joint planning. This incidentally also resulted in higher morale, because it reduced the staff isolation that is typical in elementary and secondary schools.

Third, schools vary significantly in the kinds of rewards they provide for pupils. On the average, Rutter shows there was three times as much punishment as reward. But the differences among schools were great, and the outcomes in both conduct and delinquency were better in those schools where teachers frequently praised pupils' work. Schools that took students on outings more often also had better academic results, as did schools whose staff were willing to see pupils about a problem at any time, not just during stated hours.

Rutter's work as well as Coleman's latest research[5] indicate that our previous measures of school differences were too crude to reveal very significant differences in school climates, and that these climates–which are created by teachers and staff as much as by what pupils bring to the school—do have real

effects. We do not know as much about what may cause these differences or how climates are created. The most important thing may be the ability of the head teacher or principal to engender trust with the staff and to engage in conversation with teachers about essential matters; all the rest—consistency, expectation, and enabling conditions—may flow from that.

Several studies of American schools have argued that they are "loosely coupled" organizations. Karl Weick suggests that such schools are characterized by tenuous connections among components, a confusion of goals, unresponsiveness to directives, and an absence of linkages one would expect if the system were more rational.[6] Teachers who were interviewed by Dan Lortie seemed to feel a "good day" is one in which they experience little interference by the administrators or others and are able to do what they want in the classroom.[7] Indeed, Philip Cusick, in a highly imaginative study of personal networks among teachers, found that teachers valued their autonomy and that not much of a network exists.[8] Reading Rutter's work in this context prompts the question: What makes the difference between a school with very loose bonds and one that has a strong sense of shared purpose that seems to create a good climate for learning?

For the past two years, my colleagues and I have been trying, through participant observation in a small sample of schools, to understand how a given climate is created. Our focus has been goal-oriented action within the school and the struggles that teachers and administrators engage in to achieve certain ends. We came to see that to understand the character, or climate, of a school, one had to understand the relationship between intellectual and moral climates on the one hand and the nature of authority on the other. Americans who hear the word *authority* tend to think of authoritarianism, but of course no social organization can be sustained if it is not grounded in some form of authority. Authority truly understood means "the rightful use of power to create the means of coordination of action."[9] That power resides in persons and is exercised through a command, or as Yves Simon puts it, "through a practical judgment to be taken as a rule of conduct by the free will of another person." The essential function of authority is to assure the united action of a multitude in the pursuit of some common good. Empirically, Michael Rutter's measures for consistency in disciplinary measures, level of shared expectations among teachers with respect to homework, and average time spent in teaching seem to indicate the presence or absence of such a "means of coordination."

It is the way that authority is instituted as well as the manner in which it is exercised that shapes the intellectual and moral character of a school. There are three aspects or components of that authority, and they can be thought of as three concentric circles. In the inner circle are those adults who give commands and who have primary responsibility for the school's functioning. As Rutter shows, it is the quality and vision of the leadership, teachers, and staff of a particular school who, were they not constrained by other forces, could make a difference in the character of education by the policies, traditions, and norms they establish in that school. But they are bounded by the second circle—which was the element most discussed by Coleman in his earlier work—the ethnic and social-class mix of the students, which is an imperfect indicator of more complex parental influences such as motivation for achievement, disposition to schooling, and behavioral norms.

The third major component—the outer ring—is made up of external policies or constraints, federal, state, and local governmental policies, as well as the courts and an increasing number of nongovernmental agencies that make policy and establish the context within which the schools must function. In addition to the greatly expanded role of federal and state regulation, testing agencies exert a large influence on the aims of education, textbook publishers shape the content of the school curriculum, and an array of new advocacy groups are making policy through the courts.[10]

If we visualize these three layers as the skin, flesh, and seeds of a fruit, the American high school of 1900 was like an avocado. Its center of adult power and initiative was unified and virtually impregnable, its meaty middle layer of students was fairly homogeneous, and its skin of external policy was thin and clearly defined. The high school of 1950 was more like a cantaloupe, a good middle-class fruit with a considerably expanded student body. External policies such as regents' examinations and curriculum guides in the more progressive states had grown somewhat, but at the center there was still considerable room for adult action and initiative. If the staff were more specialized, they were still bound together in a net of connective tissue. The high school of 1981 is like a watermelon, with a thick rind of federal and state policy, a greatly expanded and diverse student body, and no clearly definable center. Like watermelon seeds, the adult specialists are dispersed throughout it, and commands—often in conflict—issue from a variety of locations.

Of course, all such typifications are exaggerations, and historical transitions cannot be demarcated so distinctly. In fact, each type of high school exists today. If we think of the watermelon rind as being an accretion of bureaucracy, court orders, union contracts, and new measures of accountability—nearly all of which were by-products of efforts to correct injustices—it is most typical of urban schools. The cantaloupe can still be found in many rural and suburban areas where the student composition remains fairly homogeneous and community consensus acts as a buffer to litigation-prone interest groups. In search of the avocado, we must leave public education and enter the world of private schools. The great paradox in American education today is that only the privates have a public in the classical sense. The greatest shift that our friend Jay could make would be to transfer from a public high school in Boston to a Quaker or Jesuit high school, or to St. Paul's or Andover. It is the line between private and public that represents the most radical division in the character of American education today.

Public education in urban areas today is increasingly instrumental, technicist, adversarial, and officially value-neutral, all a result of good intentions gone awry and an uncritical faith in what schools alone can do to solve social ills. American public schools shouldered an enormous share of the burden of creating a more equal society. As the schools became a primary avenue for the social initiatives of the sixties and the seventies, mountains of new law and regulation piled up, radically altering the freedom of action that adults in the school had previously enjoyed, and uprooting old communities and established ways of acting.

The new laws and programs also created legions of new specialists and technicians in the schools, whose salaries were paid through federal and state funds, and who therefore often felt less loyalty to the school principal or to the

school's traditional authority structure. One of the elementary schools in our sample has ninety-one staff persons. Of these, only thirty-three are teachers with full-time classroom responsibilities. Twenty-three are resource persons on duty for significant parts of the day and week: social workers, psychologists, music teachers, art, reading specialists, fourteen full-time aides, and two co-principals. Thirty years ago, with a similar enrollment, the school had only one principal, one secretary, a janitor, a teacher in each class, no aides, one art teacher, and one part-time physical education instructor. A shift in that magnitude has enormous implications for leadership, for the task of creating a means of coordination within the school. It is much more complex than the problem of wider span of control, for what these numbers reflect is the growth of separate professional cultures in the school. New roles are being shaped, statuses competed for, and conflicting ideologies or modes of interaction with the child tested. Our field notes are replete with instances of these tensions. Teachers are disgruntled because psychologists make decisions about placing children in their classrooms without consulting them. Teachers who are responsible for an in-school detention room complain that counselors are unavailable when needed, because "they are always in meetings or interviews and can't be disturbed." Aides feel they should have equality with the teachers in the classroom and are reluctant to accept direction.

When federal and state funds were provided to achieve new aims, the government was naturally interested in whether targets were being met. These new strings, together with traditional concerns for efficiency (now married to a new technocratic faith that things could work if only the schools were made more rational), brought new measures of accountability and control into what had been more laissez-faire relations between teachers and administrators. Teachers came to feel more like functionaries in an engineered system, seldom rewarded for what they regarded as successes, but incessantly reminded of their failures, in a system that came close to demanding that outcomes be equal. The spread of program-planning budgeting systems in the federal government trickled down to state and city school systems, and the attempt to transfer technology brought with it a different view of defining and solving problems.

Increased expectations, a new sense of entitlement among many previously disfranchised groups, and new laws specifying new rights encouraged many people to take legal action or to threaten suit as the first response to any grievance or presumed inequality, rather than seeing the law as a court of last resort. This changed the context within the school and the relations between parents and school officials. New advocacy groups used the courts as never before to press specific interests and mandates upon the school, increasing the responsibilities of school officials while undermining their power and authority. And wherever an inequity was shown, an educational remedy was presumed, sometimes illogically.[11]

At the same time, society insisted that schools perform ever greater custodial functions while sharply limiting the power of adults to discipline students, who were no longer regarded as children but as possessing new equalities vis-à-vis adults. There is now an extraordinary diversity in schools within a more involuntary setting. The schools have become one of the few institutions in our society that have no effective vetoes. They are the universal receptors. Some

parents are walking out on their children, or turning them out to group homes; prison terms have grown shorter; mental institutions are dumping patients on the street. But the schools must not only house all the young, they must teach them and be held accountable for doing so. There are new pressures to keep these involuntary participants happy: increased curricular choice, expanded children's rights, and weakened margins between adults and children. As teachers have come to be seen as something more like wardens, their status has been lowered.

It is the new adversarial and legalistic character of urban public schools that would be most noticeable to an observer who had not visited a public school since the mid-1960s. Upon entering a Boston public high school, Jay would be handed "The Book," a twenty-five page pamphlet detailing student rights, with less than half a page on student responsibilities. In this pamphlet a student learns that there are five different types of suspensions, the least serious being the short-term one for three days or less. Before even that can be meted out, a student has the right to request an informal hearing with the headmaster and his parents and, if dissatisfied, may appeal to the community superintendent. He (or she) has the right to summon student witnesses to each of these hearings and to have an advocate or lawyer appointed to represent him. Before a student can be expelled, he may exhaust all these steps and, additionally, have a formal hearing with the deputy superintendent and an automatic review and appeal by the superintendent of the schools of the city of Boston. He can be expelled only if he has afflicted serious injury on a student or staff member or has "repeatedly and flagrantly committed a suspendable offense and [whose] continued presence in school would threaten the physical safety of others or the regular running of the school, and all appropriate disciplinary methods short of expulsion have been tried, but have not corrected [the student's] behavior." Similarly, a student cannot be transferred from one class to another in the same school unless officials can prove repeated instances of flagrant misconduct.

Nearly two years of participant observation in an urban high school that is 47 percent black and has diverse ethnic and social class composition has convinced me that the increasingly legalistic character of public education is a shift of profound dimensions. In this school, as in many, order in the halls and to some extent in classrooms is supervised by hall guards or quasi-police or actual police officials. The presence of raw power indicates that authority has been lost. All behavior is regarded as tolerable unless it is specifically declared illegal. There are narrow definitions of jurisdiction. A student who complains to the school principal of being attacked is asked on which side of the street the beating took place. If it happened across the street, it would be out of the school jurisdiction and hence of no concern to the principal. A female teacher was still shaking as she told us about a group of students who had verbally assaulted her and made sexually degrading comments about her in the hall. When we asked why she did not report them, she responded, "Well, it wouldn't have done any good." "Why not?" we pressed. "I didn't have any witnesses," she replied. Adult authority is increasingly defined by what will stand up in court. There are fewer and fewer adults who have the confidence to act on Justice Frankfurter's dictum that "much that is legally permitted is repugnant to the civilized mind." If you have that confidence, and if you have created a good

community, lawyers can sometimes be useful in settling a conflict, but they cannot make a community for you.

What is also new in the present conflict is that the children themselves have been urged to become advocates and litigants. The increasing number of voices raised on behalf of children's rights has had the effect of giving children nearly equal status with adults. An important turn in the line of legal decisions can be traced to Justice Douglas's dissent in *Yoder*, in which an Amish community refused to send its children to a public high school because they felt it would be destructive of the values they held dear. The Amish freedom to run separate schools was upheld, but Douglas dissented because the children's *own* preferences were not taken into account. "Where the child is mature enough to express potentially conflicting desires, it would be an invasion of the child's rights to permit such an imposition without canvassing his views," said Justice Douglas.[12] Another decision, *Gault*, outlawed discretionary treatment of the young in juvenile courts and stipulated that juveniles must be tried by the same rules of evidence as adults. By essentially declaring that faith in the paternalism of Juvenile Court judges was unjustified,[13] the decision undid the philosophy of the Juvenile Court system established in the late nineteenth century. It was not long before the American Civil Liberties Union and other groups, following the reasoning laid down in Gault, convinced school boards that parents could not trust the paternalism of school principals either. Guidelines such as "The Book" were one result.

The spread of children's rights literature through the secondary schools has been one of the great untold curriculum success stories of the last decade. In a recent bibliography on students' rights and responsibilities, seven new titles were listed, only one of which mentioned responsibilities.[14] A variety of initiatives on behalf of children's rights have dramatically changed the psychological reality in which adults interact with children today. In fact, to put it in those terms is somewhat old-fashioned; the literature almost always refers to "students," "young people," or "persons"—seldom "children." Of course, European visitors noted more than a century ago that American parents fostered their children's independence and that our emphasis on freedom and individualism encouraged them to go their own way at a young age. But if American culture has always, to some degree, encouraged the young to test the idea "Ain't nobody the boss of me," some contemporary adolescents have gone a step further: "Don't touch me or I'll have you arrested." One can hear this new voice in first-person accounts such as from this thirteen-year-old boy:

> "In fifth grade there was this racist mean teacher who refused to let us use the class for black education classes. So we rebelled. We wore stickers to assemblies saying "Fuck Fisher," who was our assistant principal. We sat down in assemblies. We threw chairs out the windows."[15]

The theme of the oppression of youth runs through the literature, as in this excerpt from the Youth Liberation of Ann Arbor:

> We all ended up in another system of absolute authority, with the young people at the bottom. We could only be as free as our parents allowed us to be. They punished us for refusing to obey. And, just like school, the police would come

> after us if we tried to get away. Our lives are considered the property of various adults. *We do not recognize their right to control us.* We call this control *adult chauvinism*, and we will fight it. We quickly begin to learn that these schools and families are part of a whole system that is sick.[16]

This estrangement is also occurring in a society in which many adults—in school and out—are no longer sure that they know what is right, or if they do, that they have any right to impose it. An excerpt from our field notes illustrates this. Asked what she does by one of our field workers, a full-time high-school drug counselor replied:

> "Well, let me explain to you that I don't report to the school administration at all. I am directly linked up with a different agency outside the school itself. If anybody in school is considered to be either high or a habitual drug abuser, then they are referred to me, and I try to set up a counseling session with them, but the school itself does not handle drug cases."

When asked if she directly approached students in the school that she knew to be drug users, she replied:

> "Let's face it. It's not a problem if there is no effect on the kid's performance. I mean, who are we to say what's right or wrong? A kid could always turn around and say to you, "How many of the faculty have an alcohol problem or a drinking problem?" and yet their job goes on, they continue to teach—they can point that out to you. So who are we to say what's right or wrong?"

Here is the collapse of adult authority as representing a standard for children. Not only did she express no moral authority, she actively concurs in the notion that adults in general deserve none because *some* adults have a drinking problem. The quotation also illustrates the earlier point about the increasing division of labor in the school: "Let me explain to you that I don't report to the school administration at all." The administration is not personalized as the principal, but is faceless "school administration." She feels no loyalty, no obligation to a community standard. Her "explanation" is really a declaration of independence.

Pressed about her personal attitude toward drugs, the counselor took no stand, saying that if she said she approved of drug use, the administration would fire her. On the other hand, she did not think she would be believable to the kids if she said she did not use drugs. Hence, the model that she presents to students is that of a neutral facilitator of the conversation. It is up to the kids to decide. She also exhibits a technicist's mentality when she says, "Let's face it! It's not a problem if there's no effect on the kid's performance." It is only the technical performance, the score, the end product that matters; her view implicitly, if not explicitly, rules out questions of character, of responsible and desirable conduct.

If Jay left such a school for Andover, he would leave a school that implicitly teaches students to think, "How can I manipulate this rule system to maximize

my self-interest?" to enter a community that would teach him to ask, "What is expected of me, and what do I owe to others?" Contrast the legalisms from "The Book" excerpted above with this statement from the Andover catalogue:

> In a community such as Andover, all must commit themselves to the goals of the community and to loyalty to each other. Since education at Phillips Academy is both intellectual and humane, the students and faculty derive mutual support from sharing of themselves and their ideals. . . . Yet the happiness of everyone in the community depends on consideration and awareness, restraint and candor, discretion and shared joy. Collaboration toward these imprecise but worthwhile ends is an expectation which all in the academy hold.[17]

It would be hopelessly romantic to assume that all private schools are like Phillips Academy. The fastest growing sector of private education consists of fundamentalist and all-white academies, some of which have less noble ideals.[18] Nor do schools like Phillips Academy serve only the ends listed in their catalogues. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that private education owes its character solely to wealth and snob appeal. We included a school like Andover in our study, but we also spent a year in an inner-city Catholic school whose enrollment was two-thirds black (most of whom were Protestant) and that served many welfare families at a per pupil expenditure less than half that spent by the public schools in the same city. What struck us most powerfully even in our small sample (we visited thirty-three schools and spent a year of intensive field work in five) was that the differences between the privates and the publics were in some ways as great or greater than the social class differences between the schools.

The private schools have two kinds of freedoms that are not present in the same way in the public schools. The first of these might be called "freedom from." The private school is not encumbered by that thick external layer of constraints and policies that has contributed to the technicist and adversarial culture in many public schools. In fact, it was by virtue of carrying out our work simultaneously in public and private settings that we came to understand how those constraints operate in the public school. The second freedom might be called voluntarism, or "freedom for." That is, private school parents are not just fleeing public schools or engaged in white flight, although some are. Most seek the ethos or tradition that the particular school represents. That tradition is usually a way of talking about character, and represents some agreement about which virtues are most worth having. A primary function of private schools is to make visible an otherwise invisible collectivity, to draw together a public that shares similar preferences. The private school is both a symbolic and an actual representation of valued moral and intellectual goods. The fundamental role of leadership in a private school is to bring persons into communication about ways of inculcating and sustaining those values. The leaders of such schools are chosen because they exemplify those values; they are "the best of us," persons capable of symbolizing the tradition and of drawing others into it. Leaders are supposed to have the wisdom to choose teachers who represent the tradition. They must be able to evoke shared commitments and to lead others in fuller realization of the valued goods of the community. The quality and character of the teachers are believed to make a great difference. The community stretches

through time and measures individuals against perduring standards. Traditions are a way of pointing to those standards and sensing their weight. The parents choose to enroll their children in that community, but children do not so much choose the tradition as they are enveloped by it.

Although any discussion of ideal types of the public and private in an essay of this length must inevitably oversimplify, the problem of leadership in the public setting is quite different. The leader is not selected as an instantiation of particular virtues but for competence in interpersonal skills, fairness in enforcing rules, and strength to withstand conflict. Skilled negotiators and coordinators are sought for leadership positions, and they choose others on the basis of their competence in performing a specialist's role. Whereas the head of a private school is largely a symbolic communicator with the external public (in fact, must continually re-create and sustain that public), the public school principal must be a skilled advocate within a bureaucracy. The principal in a public setting can be a mere satisfier, presiding over the rule system, the guardian of process with no vision of desired outcomes. Personal charisma earns some an extra measure of authority that enables them to create a semblance of community within a bureaucratic system. But the relentless temptation in an environment of competing and often aggrieved interest groups is to abandon any effort to achieve transcendent ideals by which all could be bound and to fall back into the role of a passive agent of process.

Of course, my account of urban public schools has emphasized some of the unintended negative consequences of policies that, from another perspective, can be seen as achievements; to some degree, our problems are a function of our successes. We have laid a tremendous burden on the American schools: namely, to be the principal avenue of creating a more equal and just society. We have attempted to right some great wrongs and have carried out a social revolution in the schools. We have abolished geographical notions of community; we have brought black and white and Chicano, and children in wheelchairs, into the classrooms. We have had to hire more specialists to minister to them and more lawyers to argue on their behalf. As Richard Sennett would put it, we have introduced "purposive disorder" into the schools. Sennett argues that chaos may not be an inevitable outcome of giving people a chance to "democratically deform" preexisting controls and structure of authority.[19] We can hope that the new polity we are now constructing will lead to a new and more just order.

But close observation of the world created by our good intentions troubles me. It is possible that what my colleagues and I have seen in a few schools is unrepresentative of most. I have drawn a grim portrait, not to declare our experiments a hopeless failure, but to provide a vision of the task that confronts us. I have suggested the direction in which the modern American public high school is tending. It threatens to become a container for adolescents who receive the ministrations of a greatly enlarged core of specialists in a setting in which presumed equals argue about their rights, and individuals pursue their moral preferences in whatever direction they please, so long as they do not break the law. The only test the larger society applies to such a collectivity is the test of efficiency: Is the school effective in producing increases in cognitive functioning as measured by standardized tests? We have too frequently reduced talk about good schools to talk about effectiveness. We no longer seem to recall Aristotle's

language of intellectual and moral virtues;[20] we speak only of a reductionist version of intellectual virtue, as reflected in standardized test scores.

My indictment must strike some ears as a reactionary lament. Was not the nation founded on the enlightenment values of equality, liberty, and the individual pursuit of happiness? Have I not simply described the broad shift from particularistic and often inequitable forms of traditional authority to typically modern and more universalistic forms of legal-rational authority? How could we expect so central an institution as schooling to be exempt from such a general historical development?

That question directs our attention to the way in which American schools have combined aspects of traditional and legal-rational forms of authority. They have been traditional, or community-based, in that they were, for most of our history, locally financed and neighborhood-based. As schools have become more centralized and urban, and as both financing and school policy have shifted to state and federal levels, legal-rational, or bureaucratic, forms of authority have been superimposed on traditional forms of local governance.

Yet I feel uneasy about the exercise of legal-rational authority in its pure form in schools, because it presumes we are dealing with adults who are pursuing their preferences in a system of legal rules. It presumes also that the individual already has been educated and has some notion of what it means to be a decent human being, of how one should act toward another *beyond* what is prescribed or proscribed by law. In the process of receiving an education we are not merely absorbing facts and learning skills, but we are as well being inducted into some set of standards, beliefs, and values about what it means to be a human being. Schools, even in democratic and pluralist societies, have had the responsibility for teaching what R. S. Peters calls a provisional morality.[21] By provisional, Peters means that teachers initiate children into such beliefs in a nonbehavioristic way, not stamping or "fixing" a particular moral content for life, but teaching in such a way that the children recognize that as adults they will have the responsibility and freedom to reevaluate those beliefs. The crisis of authority in the American school is that in many places we no longer have any agreement on what that provisional morality ought to be, or we feel that any attempt to provide it is a form of indoctrination. Hence, we have moved closer to the pure model of legal-rational authority, prematurely declaring—even insisting—that children are adults capable of choosing their own morality as long as they do not commit crimes. In some communities, particularly in rural areas, enough agreement about what that provisional morality is still exists, so that teachers and public school staff can operate on a basis of informal trust within a legal-rational system. Where that trust does not exist, I think we are headed for ever greater stress, instability, and perhaps the eventual abandonment of the public schools.

A system of bureaucratic, or legal-rational, authority operates on principles of selection by expertise, subsumed under rules that maximize efficiency and administered with formalistic impersonality. It can work in a factory, where workers sell their labor by contract to make a product by the most efficient means under agreed-upon rules, and where neither emotional commitment nor any agreement on the goodness or worthwhileness of what is produced is required. But education by its very nature must occur in a community, must

draw on emotional commitments, engender sympathy for others, and produce something in us that we feel has great value. Once children are brought together to share a common life, we have an inescapable responsibility to develop their moral as well as intellectual virtues. We are paying great costs because we increasingly operate our public schools as though they were factories for learning in which the only value is increased cognitive output. Three responses to this situation are likely:

1. To withdraw children from public schools and place them in private schools, which are communities chosen by those who share a provisional morality.
2. To seek some new basis of establishing a provisional morality within the public schools, which raises the question of how we regenerate a dialogue about moral education in an increasingly technicist society.
3. To push the legal-rational model to its individualistic limits, which would require that we dismantle the public school system as we know it. Instead of education in a school community, we would establish a contract-learning system in which children or their parents would be free to sign up at any computer terminal that was available, so to speak. Learning would operate solely by individual contract, much as it does now for adults who may take a course in macrame or accounting in their spare time. Private firms would be licensed by the government as reading and mathematics instruction centers for young children. When they can read, they choose courses themselves. State educational agencies would be restricted largely to testing and credentialing functions.

The first option is currently enjoying a considerable vogue. Vouchers or tax credits may enable more parents to send their children to schools that represent a community of value. In some cases they may be motivated by racist or elitist values, just as such motives often influenced parents to move to exclusive suburbs to enroll their children in public schools there. That risk would be worth taking if voucher plans widened choice for parents of the neediest children. Vouchers are no panacea, however, and advocates are likely to overestimate the number of new schools that would be formed. Good schools are good communities, and these are not instantaneous creations that can be thrown up like a chain of "7-11" stores. The private schools themselves are divided on the question, with opponents of voucher plans arguing that tax support would inevitably bring unwelcome governmental controls.

We cannot avoid the responsibility for facing up to the second option, which requires a fundamental rethinking of the nature and purpose of public education. We cannot return to a golden age that never was, nor can we put McGuffey's Readers back on the shelves. But we need to reinvent a modern equivalent for the McGuffey's Reader, a provisional morality that expresses some of the common beliefs of a democratic pluralist society[22]—which means that, although we respect differences of opinions on many issues, there are some salient or core beliefs to which all subscribe. Pluralism is in fact not possible

without agreement on some kinds of values: the minimal order required for dialogue, the willingness to listen to one another, respect for truth, the rejection of racism (or openness to participation in the dialogue), as well as those transcendent values that shore up the whole society—a sense of altruism and service to others and respect for personal effort and hard work.[23] Without such agreement, one does not have a public, but a kind of radical, relativism; not pluralism but mere coexistence.

Those who favor the third option, or what I have called a contract-learning system in the legal-rational mode, believe that such coexistence is all we can legitimately hope for. Enthusiastic advocates for such a system abound. Apart from the prescription of law, they believe all moralities are private. They see no need for a common school nor for any public forum for the discussion of virtue. But in such a world, even assuming a perfect system of law, where do we develop a sense of discretion about when or whether to sue? For no legal system can stand if all are litigants much of the time. Where do we develop a sense of sympathy? For even when we are right, we should not always press for damages. Where do we develop a sense of integrity? For we can be within the technical limits of the law but without a shred of virtue. Where do we develop a sense of community that sustains us midst the mess and slippage, the horrible contingencies of this life,[24] against which the law offers little refuge?

References

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[1]See Harriet Wilson, "Parents Can Cut the Crime Rate," *New Society*, December 4, 1980; and Richard Barth, "Home-Based Reinforcement of School Behavior," *Review of Educational Research* 49(3) (Summer 1979).

[2]James S. Coleman et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966).

[3]However, in his latest work, which is forthcoming, Coleman emphasizes the role of discipline and homework policies in producing distinctive outcomes for pupils of similar background. See James S. Coleman, Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore, "High School and Beyond: A National Longitudinal Study for the 1980s, Public and Private Schools," a report to the National Center for Education Statistics (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, March, 1981).

[4]Michael Rutter, Barbara Maughan, Peter Mortimore, and Janet Ouston, *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

[5]Coleman et al., "High School and Beyond."

[6]Karl E. Weick, "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21 (March 1976): 3.

[7]Dan C. Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 168-75.

[8]Philip A. Cusick, "A Study of Networks among Professional Staffs in Secondary Schools," presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, Boston (April 1980).

[9]Yves Simon, *Nature and Functions of Authority* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1948), p. 6.

[10]Many of the new advocates who shape school policies are neither elected nor accountable to anyone who is, which David Cohen argues is one of the central paradoxes in school governance. See his "Reforming School Politics," *Harvard Educational Review* 48(4) (November 1978).

[11]For a discussion of inappropriate and illogical legal mandates, see Arthur Wise, *Legislated Learning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

[12]Wisconsin v. Yoder, 406 U.S. 205, p. 242.

[13]In re Gault, 387 U.S. 1, 13.

[14]See the bibliography compiled by Susan E. Davison, "Curriculum Materials and Resources for Law-Related Education," in *Social Education*, March 1977, reprinted in the National School Resource Network's "Core Curriculum in Preventing and Reducing School Violence and Vandalism: Course 3, School Climate" (Washington, D.C: Center for Human Service, January, 1980).

[15]Youth Liberation of Ann Arbor, "We Do Not Recognize Their Right to Control *Y*'s," in *The Children's Rights Movement: Overcoming the Oppression of Young People*, Beatrice Gross and Ronald Gross (eds.) (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977), p. 126. In the introduction to the volume, the authors write: "A good case can be made for the fact that young people are the most oppressed of all minorities. They are discriminated against on the basis of age in everything from movie admissions to sex. They are traditionally the subjects of ridicule, humiliation, and mental torture by adults. Their civil rights are routinely violated in homes, schools, and other institutions" p. 1.

[16]Ibid., p. 128. Emphasis in the original.

[17]An eloquent statement of goals adopted by the faculty of Phillips Academy is reprinted in the 1979-80 *Catalog*. The faculty seek to provide "a rigorous academic education" and speak at great length about other virtues as well: "physical agility, endurance and resilience . . . notions of fair play and sportsmanship . . . encouraging the study and exercise of religious beliefs, . . . responsibility, resourcefulness and social concern" p. 12.

[18]An essay of this length cannot do justice to the variety of private schools in America, which include Jewish, Lutheran, and Catholic parochial schools, as well as the expanding fundamentalist schools, which vary greatly among themselves. Only a few of these are consciously racist, and many manage to combine a rigorous education with fundamentalist religious beliefs.

[19]Richard Sennett, *Authority* (New York: Knopf, 1980), p. 190.

[20]For one of Aristotle's richest passages, and his plea that education must be public and not private—"since the whole city has one end, it is manifest that education should be one and the same for all"—see his *Politics*, Book VIII, chapter 2, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Richard McKeon (ed.) (New York: Random House, 1941), pp. 1305-06.

[21]Richard S. Peters, *Authority, Responsibility and Education* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973), pp. 140-56.

[22]I am indebted to my colleague John Briggs for discussions of the complexities of issues of pluralism and public education, and for pointing me to the work of John Higham, particularly his essay, "Integration vs. Pluralism: Another American Dilemma," in *The Center Magazine*, July/August 1971, pp. 67-73.

[23]Surveys reveal a significant erosion of these core values in American society. For example, parents appear to be less altruistic, with 66 percent feeling that "they should be free to live their own lives even if it means spending less time with their children," and 63 percent say they have the right to live well now "even if it means leaving less to the children." And only a minority (43 percent) now believe "hard work always pays off," whereas 58 percent endorsed that view in 1969. However, 57 percent agree it is best to "demand a lot" from children and presumably believe the schools should teach students that they have to "do their best to get ahead." Daniel Yankelovich, "New Rules in American Life," *Psychology Today* 15(4) (April 1981): 35-91. One could argue that it is impossible for the schools to transmit what the adults no longer believe. But it is also possible that a ten-year shift in opinion about the value of hard work will not become a permanent change in values unless we act as if it is inevitable. The consensus we attempt to achieve in public schools will have much to do with the outcome.

[24]We cannot—nor should we—attempt to remove every possible stress in the maturation process. Nor would I assert that a good school must be conflict-free. Conflict is inevitable in life, and particularly in adolescence. It matters in what context it occurs and what the response is on the part of adults. Although I have emphasized the responsibility of adults for the character of schools, I do not see socialization as the primary goal of schooling. Rather, I believe we have gone too far toward the "cognitive output" model in efforts to correct an earlier exaggerated emphasis on "life adjustment" and personality skills. We need both mind and character. Schools can be neither morally neutral producers of cognitive skill nor witless producers of virtue. For a good discussion of the socialization debate, see Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), especially pp. 234-39.

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